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AN ESSAY

C.W.F.

ON

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CONGRESSIONAL CAUCUS
AS A MACHINE FOR NOMINATING CANDIDATES
FOR THE PRESIDENCY

BY

C. S. THOMPSON,

OF THE

CLASS OF 1902,

ACADEMICAL DEPARTMENT, YALE UNIVERSITY.

AWARDED FIRST PRIZE IN THE COMPETITION FOR THE
YEAR 1902.



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Terms of Foundation

of the

John Addison Porter Prize in American History.

TO THE PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF YALE COLLEGE IN NEW HAVEN :

Being desirous of founding a permanent memorial of my husband, the late JOHN ADDISON PORTER, Yale 1878, within the Academic Department, of which he was a graduate, I, AMY BETTS PORTER, of Pomfret, Connecticut, submit the following offer:

(1) I will forthwith convey to the President and Fellows of Yale College the sum of \$2,000 cash, for a permanent endowment fund.

(2) The income of this fund shall in each year be paid out by said Corporation for a prize, to be called "The JOHN ADDISON PORTER Prize in American History," which shall be constituted and continued as a memorial to the late JOHN ADDISON PORTER, Yale, 1878, Academic, and be annually so announced in the University Catalogue, together with a summary of the conditions of award thereof.

(3) This prize is established, and shall be annually awarded, on the following additional conditions :

(A) The entire income of the fund may be awarded in any year for a single prize, or it may be divided into a first prize of 75% and a second prize of 25%, respectively, of said income.

(B) The prize shall be open to competition among members of the Senior and Junior Classes in the Academic Department, for the College Year, and awarded for the best original essay on a set subject, bearing upon the Political, Constitutional or Economic, History, Condition or Future of the United States, including its Internal, External and Foreign Relations. The prize shall be awarded by three judges, who shall be appointed by the President of the University, and one of whom shall be a graduate of the Academic Department, of at least 10 years' standing. These judges shall be appointed on or before the first day of the second Academic term, the announcement and award of the prize shall be made at Commencement time.

(C) The specific subjects shall be chosen and publicly announced within the first two weeks of the first Academic term of each year, and preferably before Commencement time of the preceding College year. Suggestions as to the length and character of the essays, if any, shall be made at the time of such announcement.

(D) If, in any year, in the opinion of the judges, none of the competing essays is of sufficient excellence to merit either a first or second prize, the prize shall not be awarded; but the surplus income resulting from the endowment, in such case, may be added to the principal, or disposed of by the Corporation in some other way, related to the object of this endowment.

(E) Essays submitted in competition shall be handed in and transmitted to the judges not later than March 1st of each year. They shall be under cover, signed by a fictitious name, and accompanied by the real name of the writer in a sealed enclosure.

(4) The terms of this endowment and the conditions thereof, as set forth, may at any time be altered by agreement between myself as donor, and the Corporation of Yale College. They may also be altered after my death, by unanimous vote of the Corporation of Yale College, if it should seem for the best interests of the College, always provided that the general character of

this endowment, as a lasting memorial to the person specified, shall not be changed, and that the income of the fund shall in any event, continue to be awarded by the Corporation, within the student body which shall, in the future, correspond most nearly to the present Academic department of Yale College.

(5) The Corporation of Yale College, in consideration of the above endowment, agrees to perpetually continue the annual award of a Memorial Prize, as above constituted, and under the above conditions, unless altered by agreement, or by vote of said Corporation, as herein provided for.

YALE UNIVERSITY,
SECRETARY'S OFFICE.

NEW HAVEN, CONN., May 18, 1901.

MRS. AMY BETTS PORTER,
Pomfret, Conn.

MY DEAR MADAM: I have the honor to inform you that the following record appears in the Minutes of the meeting of the Yale Corporation held in New Haven on Tuesday, May 14th:

"The President read a communication from Mrs. Amy Betts Porter, wife of the late John Addison Porter, offering to give two thousand dollars for the establishment of 'The John Addison Porter Prize in American History.' The Corporation voted to accept the offer in accordance with the terms indicated, with hearty thanks, and to direct the Secretary to communicate to Mrs. Porter the high appreciation of the President and Fellows for her generous thought of the University."

I am, Madam, with high regard,
Very truly yours,

ANSON PHELPS STOKES, JR.,
Secretary.

Pursuant to the terms of the foregoing foundation, the following subjects were announced for the competition to be decided in the year 1902 :

“The Rise and Fall of the Congressional Caucus as a Machine for Nominating Candidates for the Presidency.”

“French Efforts to recover Louisiana, 1780–1800.”

“Did the Jay Treaty with England involve a violation of existing treaties with France? If so, was the ratification of the Jay Treaty justifiable?”

“An investigation into the History of the Lynching of Negroes in the South.”

“The American Policy of Napoleon III., 1860–1867.”

Twelve essays in all were submitted. Five of them were on the first of the above subjects, one was on the second, two were on the third, two were on the fourth, and two were on the fifth subject.

The President of Yale University appointed the following judges:

Charles Henry Smith, L.L. D.,

Professor of American History, in Yale University.

Edward Villette Rayolds, D. C. L.,

Professor of Comparative Constitutional Law and Civil Government, in Yale University.

Samuel Rossiter Betts, B. A., Yale 1875.

The Committee of Judges made the following award :

We, appointed by President Hadley judges of competition for the John Addison Porter Prize in American History, having examined the essays submitted, make our report unanimously, as follows :

We award a first prize of seventy-five dollars to **Charles Seymour Thompson**, of the Class of 1902, for his essay entitled

"The Rise and Fall of the Congressional Caucus as a machine for nominating candidates for the Presidency."

We award a second prize of twenty-five dollars to **Henry Lee Sweinhart**, of the Class of 1902, for his essay entitled "French efforts to recover Louisiana, 1780-1800."

We also desire to make honorable mention of **Henry William Hamlin**, of the Class of 1902, for his essay entitled "Did the Jay Treaty with England involve a violation of existing treaties with France? If so, was the ratification of the Jay Treaty Justifiable?" and **Eugene Heitler Lehman**, of the Class of 1902, for his essay entitled "An investigation into the History of the Lynching of Negroes in the South."

Yale University, June 8, 1902.

CHARLES H. SMITH.

EDWARD V. RAYNOLDS.

SAMUEL R. BETTS.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CONGRESSIONAL CAUCUS AS A MACHINE
 FOR NOMINATING CANDIDATES FOR THE PRESIDENCY,
by
 C. S. THOMPSON,
New Haven, Connecticut,
 Academical Department, Class of 1902.

Bibliography.

I. PRIMARY SOURCES.

1. *Newspapers and Periodicals.*

Most of the information for this essay has been gathered from this source. The papers which have been consulted are the following (Dates given here are the dates of issues which could be consulted at the University Library) :

“The National Intelligencer” (and “Washington Advertiser”). Tri-weekly, published at Washington, D. C., 1811, and later.

“The New York Herald.” Semi-weekly, published in New York. From 1802.

“The Columbian Centinel” (and “Mass. Federalist”). Semi-weekly. Published at Boston.

“The U. S. Gazette” (“for the Country”) Semi-weekly. Published at Philadelphia, 1802-1808, 1813, 1814.

“The Weekly Register.” Ed. by H. Niles. Baltimore, Md. 1811-1836.

“The American Register; or, Summary Review of History, Politics and Literature.” Ed. by R. Walsh, Jr. 2 Vol. Phila. 1817.

2. *Annals of Congress.*

For the debates in Congress relative to the caucus, the sources are : “The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the U. S.” Compiled by Jos. Gales, Sr. Washington, 1834.

"Abridgment of Debates of Congress." 1789-1850. By Thos. H. Benton. 16 Vol. N. Y. 1857-61.

3. *Collected Writings of Contemporaries.*

The following works have served for knowledge of the political character of the time more, in general, than for data respecting the caucus.

"The Writings of George Washington." Ed. Jared Sparks. 12 Vols. Boston, 1835.

"The Works of John Adams." Ed. C. F. Adams. 10 Vol. Boston. 1853.

"The Writings of Thomas Jefferson." Ed. B. L. Ford. 10 Vol. N. Y. 1895.

"The Works of Alexander Hamilton." Ed. J. C. Hamilton. 7 Vol. N. Y. 1851.

"The Writings of Albert Gallatin." Ed. Henry Adams. 3 Vol. Phila. 1879.

"Letters and Other Writings of James Madison." Pub. by Order of Congress. 4 Vol. Phila. 1856.

"The Writings of James Monroe." Ed. S. M. Hamilton. 5 Vol. N. Y. 1898-1901.

"Memoirs of John Quincy Adams." Ed. C. F. Adams. Phila 1877. 12 Vol.

4. *Other Contemporary Works.*

"History of the Republic of the U. S. of America," as traced in the writings of Alexander Hamilton and his contemporaries. J. C. Hamilton. 7 Vol. N. Y. 1859.

"Memoirs of the administrations of Washington and John Adams." Ed. from the papers of Oliver Wolcott by George Gibbs. 2 Vol. N. Y. 1846.

"Familiar Letters on Public Characters and Public Events." By Wm. Sullivan. Boston. 1834 (of no direct bearing on the caucus).

"Biographical Dictionary." By John Eliot. Boston. 1809. Article on "Joseph Warren."

“History of the Rise, Progress and Establishment of the Independence of the U. S. A.” By Wm. Gordon. 4 Vol. London. 1788.

“Constitutional Republicanism as Opposed to Fallacious Federalism.” Benjamin Austin, Jr. Boston. 1803. Paper XX., page 87, “Congressional Caucus.”

“The Olive Branch.” By M. Carey. Phila. 1817. Chap. 78, page 439, “Congressional Caucuses for President and Vice-President,” and appendix, page 9, on “Caucus.”

“Historical Sketches of the U. S.” from 1815 to 1830.” By Samuel Perkins. N. Y. 1830.

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“The Federalist,” a “Commentary on the Constitution of the U. S.” By Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison. Ed. H. C. Lodge. N. Y. 1888.

II. SECONDARY SOURCES.

1. General Histories.

“The History of the U. S. of America.” Richard Hildreth (1497-1821). 6 Vol. N. Y. 1877.

“History of the U. S. of America.” James Schouler. 5 Vol. N. Y. 1891.

“History of the People of the U. S. from the Revolution to the Civil War.” John B. McMaster. 5 Vol. N. Y. 1883.

“Constitutional and Political History of the U. S.” H. Von Holst, translated by J. J. Lalor and A. B. Mason. Chicago, 1889. Volume on period 1750-1833, pages 168 ff.

2. Other General Works.

“The American Electoral System.” Chas. A. O’Neil. New York and London, 1889 (containing many references to contemporary sources).

“The American Caucus System, its Origin, Purpose and Utility. By Geo. W. Lawton. New York and London, 1885.

"Nominations for Elective Office in the U. S." By F. W. Dallinger. New York, 1897.

"Political Parties in the U. S." By Jesse Macy. New York, 1900.

"Our Presidents and How We Make Them." A. K. McClure. New York and London, 1900.

"History of the Presidency." By Edward Stanwood. Boston and New York.

"History of Political Parties in the State of N. Y." J. D. Hammond. 2 Volumes. Cooperstown, 1846.

"The Statesman's Manual." Compiled from official sources. By Edwin Williams. 4 Volumes. New York, 1854.

"Political Text-Book for 1860, with a brief view of Presidential Nominations and elections." Compiled by Horace Greeley and John F. Cleveland. New York, 1860.

"Life of Albert Gallatin." By Henry Adams. Philadelphia, 1879."

"The Rise and Fall of the Nominating Caucus, Legislative and Congressional." M. Ostrogorski, in American Historical Review. January, 1900. Volume V., No. 2, Page 254.

The Rise and Fall of the Congressional Caucus.

From the earliest period in our history the caucus system has been an important part of the American political machinery. Long prior to the Revolution it was customary for political leaders to meet in caucus, that is, in secret assembly, and deliberate on public affairs and nominate candidates for office. William Gordon, a historian of the colonial conflict with England, dates this practice from a time not later than 1724. Writing in 1774 he thus describes the caucus system :* “The word caucus, and its derivative caucussing, are often used in Boston. * * * All my repeated applications to different gentlemen have not furnished me with a satisfactory account of the origin of caucus, * * * the word is not of novel invention. More than fifty years ago, Mr. Samuel Adam’s father, and twenty others, one or two from the north end of the town, where all the ship business is carried on, used to meet, make a caucus, and lay their plans for introducing certain persons into places of trust and power. When they had settled it, they separated, and used each their particular influence within his own circle. He and his friends would furnish themselves with ballots, including the names of the parties fixed upon, which they distributed on the days of election. By acting in concert, together with a careful and extensive distribution of their ballots, they generally carried the elections to their own mind. In like manner it was that Mr. Samuel Adams first became a representative for Boston.”

How implicitly we may place confidence in this account has been questioned, for in no other source do we find reference to the caucus at so early a date, and Gordon’s statement seems inconsistent with the more satisfactorily authenticated account in the diary of John Adams. Under the date of February, 1763, we find in the diary the following entry, the earliest known men-

* William Gordon, “History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America.” I., 365. note.

tion of a caucus : "This day learned that the Caucus Club meets at certain times, in the garret of Tom Dawes, the adjutant of the Boston Regiment. He has a large house, and he has a movable partition in his garret which he takes down, and the whole club meets in one room. There they smoke tobacco till you cannot see from one end of the room to the other. There they drink flip, I suppose, and there they choose a moderator, who puts questions to the vote regularly ; and selectmen, assessors, collectors, wardens, fire-wards and representatives, are regularly chosen before they are chosen in the town."* This seems to imply that the caucus was in 1763 a new institution, of which Adams had not previously been aware, and had it really existed for fifty years it is scarcely possible that John Adams should not have heard of it. The only way in which this difficulty can be explained is to interpret the passage not as an attempt to give information concerning a new custom which prior to that time had had no existence, but merely as a description of the particular caucus club of which one Tom Dawes was patron, and into which Adams had just been introduced. Gordon, being an Englishman, and hearing in Boston for the first time the word caucus, took pains to examine into the origin of the term and to describe its essential features. But Adams, who in Boston had long been familiar with the name and practice, speaks only of the peculiar features of the most recent development of the caucus ; whereas, had he never before known of the existence of such a practice, he would in all probability, like Gordon, have said a word for the origin and meaning of the term.†

Gordon's statement, though supported by the testimony of

* John Adams, Works, II., 144.

† See also a passage in Eliot's "Biographical Dictionary," page 472, which seems to contradict the account given by Gordon. But this, too, may be partially explained as a reference to a particular set of caucussers, inasmuch as it dates the practice from 1768, whereas we know from John Adams that it existed at least in 1763.

no other writer, is corroborated by the fact that he says nothing which in itself is unreasonable or difficult of credence, and that his assertions are made on the authority of men who would be most likely to possess proper information.* Inasmuch as there appears no motive which could have induced him to give a perverted account of the information he gathered, we may accept his assertions as the statements of men then living. His "repeated applications" for an account of the origin of the term received no satisfactory reply, but it is significant that he makes mention of "one or two" in the caucuses of 1724 "from the north end of the town, where all the ship business is carried on." Now there is apparently nothing so noteworthy in the presence of these delegates from the ship-building district that Gordon should have made such reference to them. His informants must, therefore, have told him of the "caulkers' club," which fifty years ago had been nicknamed the "caucus"; and this derivation, though not quite satisfactory to his mind, becomes more acceptable when he learns that one or two of the caulkers were present, as alleged, in 1724. Hence, although we cannot dogmatically assert that the caucus was in that year in existence, we may regard this view as in all probability correct.

In speaking of the caucus thus far we have had in mind more than is implied by references to the informal conferences and secret deliberations which have always been characteristic of mankind. Mr. Ostrogorski says that the first caucus was held by Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden, and ridicules discussion of the pre-Revolutionary caucus as irrelevant and utterly fruitless.† But these early meetings were of more immediate connection with the Congressional caucus than he thinks. In order to understand any institution we must study its origin, however remote that may be from its fully-developed form; and

* Cf. Gordon, preface.

† American Historical Review, January, 1900. Vol. V., No. 2, page 254.

on examination in the present case, we discover that after all, the Congressional caucus is not far removed from the singular assemblage which met in Tom Dawes's attic, or the ship-builders' conferences of still earlier date. A study of the Congressional caucus necessitates a survey of the caucus system from the time when it was first recognized as a system, with a name, an organization and a purpose. As such the caucus dates from 1763, if not earlier, and from that time develops slowly through the Colonial and Revolutionary period, until, under the influence of new and peculiar conditions, it appears in the form of the Congressional nominating caucus.

After the war, the clubs which had formerly convened secretly in attics or other places secluded from the censorious inquisitiveness of the Tories, threw off the mask which necessity had bound upon them and caucuses were held freely and without disguise.* Rapidly they became established as a prominent factor in religious and social life as well as in politics, so that John Adams wrote in 1816, "We have Congressional caucuses, State caucuses, county caucuses, city caucuses, district caucuses, town caucuses, parish caucuses, and Sunday caucuses at church doors.† This presents "caucussing" as a distinctive feature, which it has ever been, of the American representative system. For twenty years in the form of the Congressional nominating caucus, it focused upon its methods and practices the eyes of the nation. Consigned then to comparative oblivion, it survives in the present forms of Congressional or legislative caucuses convened for purposes of party legislation, and in the representative "primaries" to which have been assigned the nominating functions of the Congressional caucus.

In these successive periods of its growth the caucus has assumed aspects so varied that generalization is difficult. Although the caucus and primaries to-day answer the purposes which gave

* Cf. Eliot, "Biographical Dictionary," 472.

† Works, VI., 468.

occasion for the caucuses familiar to Adams and Jefferson, to Madison, Monroe and Jackson, in modes of convening, in principles of procedure and in influence they are changed. Any definition, therefore, to be applicable with even reasonable accuracy to all forms in which the caucus has appeared must, obviously, be vague and lacking in specific connotation. Failing to discover a more satisfactory expression we adopt the definition given by Gordon. The caucus, in his words, consists of "a number of persons, whether more or less, met together to consult upon adopting and prosecuting some scheme of policy for carrying a favorite point."* This appears to us to apply equally to the caucus of Revolutionary days, of which it was written, to the Congressional caucus and to the nominating and other party machinery of our era. It is at the same time sufficiently explicit and significant to afford an insight into the more apparent evils and advantages of the system.

For the words we have quoted imply union, and union means strength. In any situation where skill, learning and discretion are required, the best results can be obtained by co-operation and consultation. Whatever the point to be pursued (and nowhere has this been more recognized than in the American practice), the aims of justness and wisdom can be best attained by such union and co-operation as the caucus, when rightly used, affords. But, unfortunately, the caucus is also productive of evil. The system described in our definition implies more or less secrecy; and whenever any body, meeting in conclave apart from the people, pursues a "favorite point," there is always the temptation to profit by the shelter of secrecy; to adopt doubtful means to a questionable end. Combinations, intrigues and corruption stand ready to enter whenever ambition or jealousy opens the door. Whether jealousy and ambition are to triumph over honesty and justice depends wholly on the men who compose the caucus, who alone determine whether its

*Gordon, I., 365, note.

action shall be laudable or blameworthy. If the consultations are made "*pro bono publico*," great advantage may be gained. But if they are made to serve private interests rather than the public welfare they cannot receive too great condemnation.

The caucus, as it appeared in Congress, was peculiarly subject to these abuses. In several important respects it differed from the earlier meetings in which it originated. In the first place, being not local, but national, and hence free from the salutary restraint of close connection with a small community, it could the more easily defeat the public will. Secondly, its object was the appointment of persons to the highest offices under the government, and in proportion as the value of the stakes increases the temptation to intrigue and dishonesty becomes greater. Moreover, it met only on stated occasions, for the transaction of regular business, and thus lacked the informality and frankness which attended, in a greater or less degree, the early caucus. For these reasons the Congressional caucus was subject to most careful scrutiny by the people, and would be enabled to maintain its power only as long as it complied with their will.

The dangers inherent in the caucus system are of precisely the sort against which the statesmen of 1787 strove most earnestly to guard. The years following the Revolution in America were a time of political jealousy and suspicion. A union had been formed, but it was a union of elements so disunited that the members regarded one another with distrust and envy, and to the central government begrudging every power, every authority. In political coalitions, intrigues, and organized partisanship, were seen the enemies of liberty and republican government, and the permanence and efficiency of the newly-formed union was considered to be founded on its independence of political machinations. Especially important was it that the President of the nation should be removed from the evil influences of partisan strife, in order that in him might be found the final balance of the whole nicely balanced system. How then did it come that

a practice so fraught with the dreaded danger obtained recognition, and that almost immediately the President's office became the centre of systematic, undisguised caucusing? What circumstances obtained for the practice public recognition and national influence? How did it creep undetected into the national legislature and there, though this body had been expressly denied a right to aid in choosing a President, maintain for twenty years triumphant supremacy? These questions find their answer in the conditions and tendencies of the first decade of our government.

In striving to free the government from politics, the Convention were combating hopelessly with laws and forces of nature which forbid a non-partisan government. The country, after having thrown off its allegiance to the English throne, was not content to fold its hands and see a power within its own numbers usurp the control of affairs. Hence when the Electoral College was provided for the selection of President, to guard against the ignorance of the people and the scheming of politicians, neither politicians nor people were content with a provision which denied them a share in the all-important duty of President-making. The arts of the politician can be better exercised on the people, ill-informed and easily susceptible to persuasion and argument, than on a select body supposedly of the highest understanding and integrity, convened for the purpose of exercising their own uninfluenced judgment. The people, on their part, were jealous of the "rights" for which they had been fighting, and resented the assertion that they were incapable of choosing wisely. From all classes, therefore, came opposition. "Do I choose Samuel Miles," wrote one citizen, "to determine for me whether John Adams or Thomas Jefferson is the fittest man for President of these United States? No, I choose him to act, not to think." *

The establishment of this theory deprived the electoral college of its two functions of nomination and election. The privi-

* *Vide O'Neil, "The American Electoral System,"* 65.

lege of election was at once assumed by the people, but owing to peculiarities in the political situation a formal nominating system was not at first necessary, and this fact was one circumstance favorable to the gradual establishment of the caucus. Not until 1804, and not completely till 1808, when the early aspects of politics had changed, can the caucus be said to have been regularly established in Congress in its fully developed form. But the preceding years, from 1789 to 1804, were years of preparation. Although we have no record of anything in the first two campaigns approaching a formal caucus of members of Congress, it is certain that Hamilton and other national leaders were active in the old practice of cauassing in private for the attainment of desired ends. The subject of the Vice-Presidency was brought under the power of personal influence, secret consultations, and reciprocal compromises, and the choices were not made without much scheming.* Thus was made apparent the truth to which John Adams later gave expression with the confident assertion that the cauenses which have always existed, whether for good or evil, are unavoidable. "You cannot prevent them," he wrote, "any more than you can prevent gentlemen from conversing at their lodgings."† It was only a question of time before the rapidly-developing political parties should call for open and not secret deliberation.

The rapid divergence of party interests led to the need of a systematic method of nomination, in order that the people might know, in voting for electors, for whom they were virtually casting their presidential vote. For this purpose there was need of a body which should be able to ascertain as accurately as possible the opinion of the people, and which should impart to its decision sufficient weight to obtain the support of the party throughout the country. These purposes are answered to-day by the familiar national convention. But the country was not yet prepared for a

* Cf. John Adams, Works, VI., 542, 543. Hamilton, Works, V., 526, 527, 534, 535.

† Adams, Works, VI. 544.

national nominating convention, means of transportation being still so unsatisfactory as to render such a device impracticable. Even under the dire necessity of the Confederation it had proved almost impossible to obtain a general convention from the States, for although the State Convention was familiar to all, public ideas of national union and consolidation were not yet fully formed. For a nominating system, therefore, recourse must be had to some device already at hand.

Here we see clearly the bearing of the early informal, non-official meeting upon the later nominating caucus. In many parts of the country the custom of self-nomination had been current. But this method, though perhaps suited to a small and rural community, was manifestly unavailable for the purpose of a national nomination. Self-nomination would carry with it no weight beyond the candidate's own district, and would harm rather than benefit him in the eyes of his democratic countrymen. Elsewhere, especially in New England, candidates had been formally nominated in town or district meetings, supplemented by committees of correspondence and informal conferences behind which was felt the influence of the private caucus. Had it not been for the long period during which prominent citizens met in caucus and decided questions for the people, this device for securing union on a presidential candidate could not have presented itself. But the system of caucus nominations had installed itself as a regular part of the town and State administration. In town meeting it had proved sufficient for the purposes of local nomination, and for State nomination the caucus of members of the legislature was a higher development. In default of a better method of national nomination nothing was more natural than that the work should be intrusted to a caucus of the national legislators.*

* For a good summary of early nominating systems see Dallinger "Nominations for Elective Office," p. 3 ff. Cf. also, Ostrogorski, American Historical Review, Vol. V., No. 2, page 256 ff.; and J. S. Walton, "Nominating Conventions in Pennsylvania," American Historical Review, Vol. II., No. 2, p. 262 ff.

The first Congressional nominating caucus was held in 1796. In the summer of that year a majority of the Republican members of Congress met and named Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr as their candidates.* But the meeting seems to have been the result of a common understanding rather than a formal call or announcement, and no details of its proceedings are known. The Federalists in this year nominated John Adams and Thomas Pinckney, but whether their agreement was reached in any meeting is not certain. The nominations were made after much consultation and intriguing among the leaders, in which there was thought to have been a desire on the part of some to place Pinckney in the President's chair, accepting Adams for second place as a troublesome necessity, because of his popularity with the party.† But, in the lack of any conclusive testimony, we see no reason to think that any caucus was held by the Federal party at this third election.‡

The contest of 1800 first brought the caucus into prominence. Caucuses were held in both parties and candidates were formally settled upon. The Federal members of Congress, previous to their adjournment, held a meeting and decided that Adams and C. C. Pinckney should be their candidates, and that "fair and honorable endeavors should be used by them in their respective States to obtain concurrent votes" for the two candidates.|| The Republicans in this year held two caucus meetings. At the first Mr. Jefferson was unanimously chosen candidate for the Presidency, and it was agreed that the Vice-President should be taken from New York State.¶ Beyond this no immediate decision could

* Gibbs' "Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and Adams," II., 488.

† Adams, Works, VI., 543. Hamilton, VI., 185, 186.

‡ In immediate connection with the mention of the Republican caucus Wolcott says: "The Federal party nominated John Adams and Thomas Pinckney" (Gibbs, II., 488). But this does not necessarily imply a formal caucus nomination.

|| Letters of James McHenry, May 20 and July 22, 1800; Gibbs, II., 346-47, 384.

¶ N. Y. Herald, February 1, 1804. Cf. also Hammond, "Political Parties in the State of New York," I., 137, and Niles's Register, February 28, 1824.



be reached. Chancellor Livingston, Governor George Clinton and Aaron Burr were mentioned, but the Chancellor was incapacitated by infirmity, and the contest narrowed down to Clinton and Burr. Unable to reach a decision, the caucus expressed no preference for either of the two, but postponed action till the candidates could be sounded on the subject. Governor Clinton, when interviewed by Commodore Nicholson, unwillingly consented to the use of his name if in the judgment of the party managers it was necessary to the election of Jefferson. Burr was next consulted, and, proving a willing and an acceptable candidate, received the nomination at a second meeting of the caucus.*

The meetings of this year reveal the ease with which the caucus lent itself to underhand negotiations and duplicity. Thomas Jefferson was without question the choice of the Republican party for President, and the sight of Aaron Burr taking the oath of chief executive would have been as repugnant to them as would the spectacle of John Adams again ascending his mythical throne. But Burr had been offended at the lack of support which he had suffered in the preceding election,† and refused to be considered a candidate unless positive assurances were given him that the best efforts of the party should be used to obtain for him an equal vote with Jefferson.‡ The caucus agreed, and faithful assurance was given Burr by the most respected members of the party.|| Nevertheless it was well understood that Jefferson was the candidate whom the caucus desired for President, and that nothing was further from their plans than that Burr should receive an equal number of votes. A similar duplicity was manifested in the Federal proceedings. In

* N. Y. Herald, Feb. 1, 1804.

† See Niles's Register, December 27, 1823. Also N. Y. Herald, February 1, 1804. And Wolcott's letter to Edwards, 1824; Gibbs, II., 488.

‡ Wolcott, in Gibbs, II., 488.

|| *Ibid.* Niles's Register, December 27, 1823.

the minds of the caucus Adams was the logical candidate for the Presidency, though they were willing that Mr. Pinckney should fill the subordinate position.* But Adams had become very unpopular with many of the Federalists in the country, and it was feared that he could not receive a re-election.† It was therefore openly declared that no preference was given one candidate over the other, in order that the party might be appeased by the hope of electing Mr. Pinckney to the higher office.‡ But a member of the caucus informed his constituents in a private letter, that it was the distinct wish of the meeting that Adams and not Pinckney should be President, and efforts were made in Boston and elsewhere to have the electors throw away a part of their votes, lest Pinckney should receive more votes than Adams.||

Secret machinations of this character were not likely to decrease the unfavorable criticism which the caucus at once met. For in spite of their long familiarity with the system in its undeveloped form, the minds of many people were becoming strongly prejudiced against it, and "for any persons, particularly Legislators, to meet and consult on the subject of candidates for office" was considered a usurpation of the rights of the people.¶ The directors of public opinion were zealous in heaping abuse upon the practice, and an editorial in the "Aurora" denounced the Federal caucus of 1800 as a "jacobinical conclave." § James McHenry plainly expressed disapproval of the lack of open action. "They write private letters to each other," he said,

* Niles's Register, February 28, 1824. Gibbs, II., 398.

† Letter of George Cabot to Alexander Hamilton, August 21, 1800; Gibbs, II., 407. Cf. Hamilton, VI., 436, 440, 441, 446.

‡ Letters of James McHenry, May 20 and July 22, 1800; Gibbs, II., 346-347; 384, 407. Hamilton, Works VI., 436, 441.

|| Letters of George Cabot, July 20 and August 23, 1800; and Ebenezer Huntington, August 6, 1800; Gibbs, II., 384, 398, 407.

¶ Columbian Centinel, Feb. 18, 1804.

§ Niles's Register, Dec. 27, 1823, quotes this from the "Aurora," Feb. 19 1800.

writing of the Federal caucus, "but they do nothing to give a proper direction to the public mind. They observe, even in their conversation, a discreet circumspection generally, ill calculated to diffuse information, or prepare the mass of the people for the result. They deliberate in private. Can good come out of such a system?"* Senator Nathaniel Macon, a member of the Republican caucus, declared in the meeting that the intrigues and politically impure principles which they were inaugurating were the "seed of division" and the forerunner of the fall of the party.†

The most bitter denunciation which the caucus had yet faced appeared in 1803 in a book by Benjamin Austin, "Under what authority did these men pretend to dictate their nomination?" he demands, "Did they receive six dollars a day for the double purpose of caucusing and legislating? Do we send members to Congress to cabal once in four years for President? Or are we arrived to such a pitch of Congressional influence that what they decide is to be binding on the United States?"‡ This indignant protest was occasioned by the too presumptuous tone of "Decius," a political pamphleteer who had proudly called on the country to respect the Congressional nomination as binding.|| However patient the people may remain while a courteous and suppliant power is in reality usurping their authority, they will not for an instant brook the imperious note of command. This "Decius" learned in 1803, and the same lesson was more deeply impressed upon a too vainglorious politician in 1808.

A deep-rooted prejudice was from the outset entertained against the caucus, inasmuch as it seemed to defeat the very objects for which it had been devised. For as we have seen, the

* Gibbs, II, 384. Letter of Jas. McHenry.

† See Henry Adams, "Life of Gallatin," 595: Letter from Macon to Gallatin. Macon states that he never again attended a caucus meeting.

‡ Austin, "Constitutional Republicanism," 87 ff.

|| *Ibid.*

need for nominations had arisen from the unwillingness of the people to deprive themselves of the right of election. The people continued to grow more and more jealous of their rights, and having turned the electoral college into a machine for registering the votes of the nation, they directed their attention toward the nominating system ; did not the caucus rob them of their prerogative ? True, it was easy to argue that the proceedings of the caucus were not nominations, but merely recommendations of a select class of representatives to their constituents ; that the recommendation was not compulsory, for it left the people free to follow their own judgment. But in reality was not the recommendation most stringently binding ? Armed with the authority and influence which attached to the names of its authors, it turned the " freedom of election " of the people into a silly farce, a by-word for the Congressional dictators. This was the argument of Benjamin Austin, pioneer of the anti-caucus movement, and of countless followers.

But in certain respects their argument cannot bear the light. It cannot, indeed, be denied that to the Congressional " recommendation " was attached all the weight of the nominations by our present national convention. Had it been otherwise, it would have failed to attain its end, for it was designed to secure union of the whole party, and this it was enabled to do largely by virtue of the influence of its members, as Congressmen. But that it possessed the boundless dictatorial power attributed to it we cannot believe. Then, as now, the members of a party had the privilege of " bolting." They might either vote for the candidate of the opposing party or support an independent candidate of their own, which was done as early as 1812. The caucus was not so omnipotent that it could lead the people whither it would, and as soon as it attempted to disregard the sacred will of the majority it compassed its own destruction.

The protests against the first open assumption by members of Congress of the right to choose the party candidates did not seriously threaten the survival of the custom. For not only was

it difficult for an organized, universal opposition to be at once aroused against an institution which had arisen so gradually and so harmlessly, but the practice apparently had the sanction of necessity. The two proper functions of a nominating body in a republican government are to ascertain the will of the majority of the people whom it represents, and to endeavor to secure the consent of the minority to the majority rule. In 1800 the will of each party, save perhaps for the less important office, was unmistakable. The Republican party could have no candidate but Jefferson, and John Adams, in spite of his growing unpopularity, was really the only logical candidate of the Federalists. The question before each party was therefore, how to secure the election of its chosen candidate. For as soon as Washington retired from the field the office of President became the goal of all politicians. So closely contested was the rivalry for the position that if the party did not concentrate its vote on a particular candidate it was sure to fail.* No other method appeared by which efficient union could be effected than for members of the party in Congress to designate who, in their opinion, were the proper candidates.

But the fact that almost from the first the caucus was tolerated as a necessity rather than commended, betrays a fatal weakness in the system. An objectionable device which may for a time be sufferable in the face of a threatening danger must of necessity be rejected so soon as that danger is removed, and the advocate of its further continuance will not be respected. It is evident therefore that the caucus stood in 1800 in a precarious position. Born of uncertainty and disquiet; adopted in perplexity, half-unconsciously; opposed by prejudice and tradition, and supported only half-heartedly, it would soon be forced to prove its own fitness to live.

The ability of the caucus to make its way under such unfavorable conditions was greatly impaired by its lack of constitutional warrant. On account of this lack it was con-

* Cf. Niles's Register, Feb. 28, 1824. Perkins, "Historical Sketches," 52, 53.

stantly subjected by the jealous apprehension of the people to the charge of unconstitutionality. They forgot that the entire complexion of political affairs had changed since the adoption of the new government, and that the passive rôle of obedience which had been thrust upon the electoral college, the responsibility and authority assumed in election by themselves, and the entire system of nominations and pre-concerted arrangements, would have been no less repugnant to the Constitution framers than the practice of the Congressional caucus. But whether well founded or not, the charge of unconstitutionality afforded the opponents of the custom a convenient handle by which to wield their arguments against usurpation of rights and the prevalence of intrigue, and "unconstitutional" was the opprobrious epithet hurled with most telling effect at this new creation of the great American experiment in government.

From the weakness of its constitutional position the caucus wore more or less the aspect of a usurper; of an innovation and an anomaly in the midst of republican institutions. It was on this account more difficult for it to win the confidence and respect of the people; its proceedings were easier to disregard, and the prejudice against it more difficult to overcome. There was no prescribed method by which the meetings should be convoked, and this gave the officious Senator, who had by chance presided over the meeting in 1804, an opportunity to issue, in offensive tone, a formal call for the next caucus. Nor was there any rule by which the invitations should be extended to some and withheld from others, and thus the representation of the party depended on the caprice of a few leaders. In 1808 a delegate from one of the territories, who therefore was entitled to no vote in elections, was said to have been present by invitation at the caucus, and the people asked in vain for an explanation of the principles of representation.* The country was certainly justified in maintaining

* U. S. Gazette, Jan. 28, 1808, March 10, 1808, see "Address to the People."

that, "if a nomination is made and presented to the people, it behooves them to know by whom it is made, and the manner in which it is done." *

In its imperfect representation of the national party interests, the Congressional caucus found its weakest point. A nominating body should be representative of the party in all sections of the country, and this the system adopted by the caucus managers was not. The States or districts which were represented in Congress by the Federalists would not be included in a call "to the Republican members of Congress," and hence the Republicans living in those sections would have no voice in the nomination. To remove this objection the State Legislatures sometimes issued special invitations to delegates from the non-represented districts, and in at least one instance this step seems to have been taken by the Congressional caucus.† But such a system was impracticable, even if desired, on a national scale; for how could the delegates be recompensed for the expense and fatigue of a journey to the seat of government to partake in a single evening's work? At its very best therefore the caucus was only partially representative.

Furthermore, an important element in the downfall of the caucus was in the fact that the meetings were rendered even more unsatisfactory as a representative body than they might have been. The statistics show that eighty-six per cent. of the Republican members of Congress was the highest ever reached, and in no other meeting of which we have statistics did the number equal seventy-five per cent.‡ This was because many Senators and Representatives refused to countenance by their presence the proceedings of a body of so doubtful character and so poorly authorized to declare the will of the party. But though acting from laudable motives, they followed an unwise course, bringing

* U. S. Gazette, Jan. 28, 1808.

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Vide* "Niles's Register," Feb. 28, 1824, for tabulated statistics

down upon the caucus much odium that it need not have incurred, and thus hastening its abolition.

In 1804 caucus meetings were for the first time held openly, and that year marks the height of the rising influence of the nominating caucus. With the next election the protests, which previously had been scattered and of little immediate effect, centered in a vigorous storm which continued with only brief periods of abatement until it swept away the offensive institution and left the ground bare and desolate, and ready for a new structure. The Federalists in 1804 nominated on an official ticket, Rufus King and Charles C. Pinckney, but details of the proceedings in this year are wanting.* The declining party ceased to take a considerable part in future Presidential elections; and although an organization was maintained for several years, and candidates placed in nomination, no regular system appears to have been followed. The Republican caucus met on Feb. 25, and unanimously nominated Thomas Jefferson for President, after which George Clinton was easily chosen on the first ballot for the second position.†

A favorite argument with which the Republican advocates of the caucus tried to strengthen its position was the success of 1800, which they asserted was due to the efficiency of the caucus organization.‡ The unconcealed proceedings of 1804 met with little opposition, and in 1808 a further step was taken toward public recognition of the practice. On January 19 the members of Congress were astonished on being informed by a circular that Stephen R. Bradley, in pursuance of powers vested in him as President of the late convention, deemed it expedient, for the purpose of nominating candidates for the next presidential election, to call a meeting of the Republican members to meet in the Senate Chamber at six o'clock on Saturday evening, at which

* Columbian Sentinel, Feb. 29, 1804, March 3, 1804.

† N. Y. Herald, March 3, 1804.

‡ Benton, "Abridgment of Debates," VII., 532.

time and place their personal attendance was requested, to aid at the meeting.*

This presumption on the part of Senator Bradley called forth a series of vigorous protests against the methods and practices of the caucus and the arrogance of the call. Mr. Bradley's pompous notice was followed by a mocking placard which stated with effective sarcasm that in pursuance of similar powers vested in him, Josiah Masters deemed it expedient, for the purpose of *not* nominating candidates for President or Vice-President, *not* to call a convention to meet in the Senate Chamber on Saturday at six o'clock, at which time and place the personal attendance of the Republican members was *not* requested.† Another Senator addressed Mr. Bradley directly, declaring utter abhorrence of his "usurpation of power, mandatory style, and object contemplated."‡ He denied the right of his colleague to call upon the Republican members in this manner, and refused to countenance their "midnight intrigues." Other protests called in question the personal motives of Mr. Bradley, and it was even suggested that he had some sinister design in calling the meeting for Saturday evening, which was considered by people in New England as part of the Sabbath, so that many would refuse to join the deliberations on this account.|| George Clinton, the recipient of the Vice-Presidential nomination, was offended because his consent had not been sought for the use of his name, and complained that he first learned of the meeting only by accident on the day appointed.¶

Meanwhile the party leaders were divided in opinion as to the best course to follow; some were eager to hold the caucus as soon as possible, but others thought that advantage could be gained

* U. S. Gazette, Jan. 28, 1808.

† Niles's Register, December 20, 1823.

‡ *Ibid.*

|| U. S. Gazette, Feb. 4, 1808.

¶ Hammond, "Political Parties," I, 264.

by delay.* At the appointed time, however, the meeting was held. The proceedings were conducted with little opposition, practical unanimity prevailing as to choice of candidates. Of eighty-nine votes cast for President, James Madison received all but six, and Clinton was chosen with as little opposition for Vice-President.† In order to ensure the success of this ticket a committee, consisting of one member from each State that was represented in the caucus, was appointed to manage the campaign.

Before adjourning, the caucus, fully conscious of the opposition their action would encounter, decided to accompany their nominations with an explanatory resolution. This was drawn by Mr. Giles, of Virginia, and was unanimously adopted. The report stated that in making their nominations the congressmen "have acted only in their individual characters as citizens" and "that they have been induced to adopt this measure from the necessity of the case, from a deep conviction of the importance of union to the Republicans throughout all parts of the United States, in the present crisis of both our external and internal affairs."‡

But this apology caused no lull in the storm of opposition. Early in March a formal protest, addressed to "the People of the United States," was issued over the signatures of seventeen prominent congressmen, among whom were Josiah Masters, George Clinton Jr., Samuel Maclay and John Randolph. The protest objected to "the mode in which the meeting was summoned" and to "the proceedings after it was convened." They "proceeded without discussion or debate," the paper complains, "to determine by ballot the candidates for the highest offices in the union. The characters of different men and their pretensions to the public favor were not suffered to be canvassed, and all responsibility was avoided by the mode of

* U. S. Gazette, Jan. 28, 1808.

† U. S. Gazette, Feb. 1, 1808; National Intelligencer, Jan. 20, 1808, also May 21, 1812.

‡ U. S. Gazette, March 10, 1808, Address to the people.

selection. The determination of this conclave has been published as the act of the Republican party, and with as much exultation as the result of a solemn election by the nation." A solemn protest was therefore entered against the proceedings of the caucus as being "in direct hostility to the principles of the Constitution; as a gross assumption of power not delegated by the people," and as "an attempt to produce an undue bias in the ensuing election of President and Vice-President, and virtually to transfer the appointment of those officers from the people to a majority of the two Houses of Congress." *

It was probably due in part, at least, to the ripening hostility with England that the caucus was allowed to continue its career in 1812 with comparatively little opposition. What opposition there was centered chiefly against the re-election of Madison, and the so-called "Virginia dictation." In spite of the unanimity which prevailed in the caucus of 1808, the nomination of Madison met with much disfavor throughout the country,† and in 1812 organized efforts were made to prevent his re-election. A caucus of bolters from the Republican nominations met at Albany, in which ninety-one of ninety-five republican members of the State legislature were present, and declared unanimously in favor of DeWitt Clinton, the Federalist candidate.‡ This meeting was the result of a secret caucus which had been held at Albany in March "to ascertain the force which could be rallied in that State in opposition to the re-election of * * Madison," and which had appointed a committee of nine to sound the other States on the subject.|| But the strength of the South, led by "Old Virginia," rendered such opposition powerless to prevent the re-nomination and re-election of Madison.

The Republican caucus of this year was called by notice pub-

* U. S. Gazette, March 10, 1808, "Address to the People."

† See U. S. Gazette, Feb. 8, 1808, March 7, 1808.

‡ National Intelligencer, June 4, 1812, Niles's Register, June 6, 1812.

|| National Intelligencer, March 26, 1812.

lished in the semi-official "National Intelligencer," for the purpose of "designating such persons as they may think proper to be supported as candidates * * * at the ensuing election."* The meeting, held on the 19th of May, was a less satisfactory representation than the caucus of 1808 had been. Of the fifty-one Republicans absent many gave disapproval of the method of the caucus as their reason, while others refused to attend through dislike of Mr. Madison.† After unanimously nominating Madison for President, and deciding in favor of John Langdon for Vice-President, the meeting followed the example of its predecessor and declared that the members had acted only in their "individual characters as citizens," with a deep conviction of the importance of union * * * in the present crisis of our public affairs." A "committee of correspondence and arrangement," consisting of eighteen men from the different States was appointed to give weight to their nomination.‡ Subsequently, a second caucus meeting was called to fill the place left vacant by the resignation of John Langdon, and Elbridge Gerry received the nomination.||

The quiet of 1812, far from indicating any tendency on the part of the people to become reconciled to this new custom which had grown up in their midst, was rather only the calm before the storm. It is interesting to notice the course of successive triumphs and disasters which the caucus takes on its way to final overthrow. Although at times the energy of the opposition and the vigor of the attacks were diminished, and the caucus was permitted to pursue its designs in comparative quiet, there was at no time reason to think that its existence could be permanent. From the year 1808, when the first fusillade of arguments and reproaches cleared a path for later

* *Ibid.*, May 16, 1812.

† Cf. Niles's Register, Feb. 28, 1824.

‡ National Intelligencer, May 19, 1812.

|| *Ibid.*, June 11, 1812.

attacks, it was evident that the career of the caucus was limited by circumstances over which the power of politicians had no control, and the most discerning persons awaited the not distant day when a system so full of evils might be replaced by a more able successor.

The proceedings of 1816 are full of interest. On the 12th of March a number of the Republican Congressmen assembled, pursuant to an anonymous notice which had been issued to each of the Republican members personally, "for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of recommending" candidates.* This preliminary meeting, which was thus a tacit recognition of the questionable propriety of the caucus, resolved, "in order to obtain a more general expression of the sentiment of the Republicans," to hold a caucus, the invitations for which were to be extended by notice in the Washington papers.† On Saturday, March 16th, one hundred and eighteen members of the Senate and the House, together with one delegate, assembled with some uncertainty still felt as to the advisability of declaring nominees.‡

After organization and appointment of officers the meeting proceeded to the business before it, and Henry Clay submitted the resolution "that it is inexpedient to make, in caucus, any recommendation to the good people of the United States, of persons, in the judgment of this meeting, fit and suitable to fill the offices of President and Vice-President of the United States." The question on this resolution being determined in the negative, Mr. Taylor, of New York, submitted a similar resolution declaring the inexpediency of the caucus. This resolution, the spirit and form of which differed in no respect from that of the first, was also defeated, and the meeting proceeded without further discussion to the recommendation. The balloting gave James

* Niles's Register, March 23, 1816.

† *Ibid.*

‡ American Register, II, 452.

Monroe sixty-five votes, and Wm. H. Crawford fifty-four votes, for the Presidential candidate, and Daniel D. Tompkins, of New York, was named for Vice-President. Monroe and Tompkins were accordingly named as the party standard-bearers.*

But when the alarming fact was made known to the country that had only six of the caucussers who voted for Monroe declared instead for Crawford, the latter would have received the nomination, the protests which had been quieted in 1812 burst forth once more. The caucus proceedings were regarded as an attempt on the part of the strong Crawford faction to place their favorite ahead of the man who was undoubtedly the choice of the people, and the narrow margin by which this "spurious and unhallowed act" † had failed, reminded the people how poorly their interests were safeguarded. Although the caucus in this year was in numbers more representative of the party in Congress than any other meeting of the kind,‡ it did not in reality represent the relative strength of the two aspirants. The anonymous call was understood to have proceeded from the friends of Crawford, and the friends of Monroe refused to attend a meeting on such an invitation.|| Hence there was reason for the estimate made by the "National Intelligencer," that of the twenty-four absentees more than three-fourths were friendly to the election of Monroe.¶

The following editorial comment in the "Intelligencer" expressed a sentiment rapidly becoming universal. "If caucusing * * * be necessary among parties to secure unity of action, would it not be expedient to devise some more equitable method than the present; some method which shall more truly refract the sense of the people from different parts of the country, without interference with the official duties of the members of Con-

* American Register, II, 452. Niles's Register, March 23, 1816.

† See Perkins, "Historical Sketches," 51 ff.

‡ Niles, Feb. 28, 1824.

|| National Intelligencer, March 12, 1816.

¶ *Ibid.* March 19, 1816.

gress, and without being subject to the influence of considerations which ought to have no bearing on the question? Some method, which shall represent all the Republicans in the United States, and not those sections of country only which send Republican representatives at the moment? * * * Should the day unfortunately ever arrive when a nomination shall be made adverse to the public sentiment the evil of this system will be felt." *

In consequence of the "Era of good feelings" which followed the election of Monroe, there was no need of a nomination in 1820. To be sure, an attempt was made by a few to hold a meeting for the purpose of declaring nominations, but it was favored by so few that it was decided to be impolitic to take any action. † A general opinion prevailed that the caucus had at last died a natural death, and that its failure in this year was the last gasp of the dying system. But the country was not to be rid of the caucus so easily. Rising again in 1824 it called into decisive conflict all the forces on each side, the champions and opponents of its methods. The "Era of good feelings" proved in reality an era of very turbulent feelings, and the whole nation was shaken by the clash of the opposing forces.

As early at least as the second year of Monroe's second administration there began to be much conjecture and scheming as to his successor in office.‡ John Quincy Adams, Calhoun, Clay, DeWitt Clinton, Crawford and Tompkins were proposed in various quarters as candidates, not to mention a dozen others who had aspirations.|| The more prominent of these candidates were so evenly matched, that it early became a serious question as to how a decision could be effected when the matter came to an issue. Now, if ever, there was need of

* National Intelligencer, April 9, 1816.

† National Intelligencer, April 8, 1820; April 11, 1820; Niles's Register, May 29, 1819; April 15, 1820.

‡ Niles's Register, January 19, 1822; January 25, 1823.

|| See Niles's Register, January 26, 1822; April 27, 1822.

union. The former expedient of caucus nominations was therefore recalled, and the great political question of the day centered on the practicability of reviving the custom.

The caucuses of 1800 had been justified on the plea that such action was necessary to secure the triumph of the party cause. With the disappearance of the Federalist party as an important factor in the political campaigns, many early advocates of the caucus as a necessary party expedient opposed its continuance, as no longer excused by the plea of necessity. If the victory of the party was assured without such a device it ought not to be resorted to, they said.* According to one expression of this view, a Congressional caucus is legitimate only when there are rival candidates of different parties, and when within the same party there are two or more candidates, one of whom *must* be withdrawn to concentrate the force of the party on the other, that victory might be assured.† Or, as otherwise phrased, " whenever certain sets of *principles* are to be supported or opposed, a caucus may be tolerated as the means of extinguishing personal views and promoting union among the adherents or opponents of such sets of principles ; but when a caucus is got up to act in favor of an individual, separated from the consideration of any peculiar principles which he proposes, there is nothing that ought to be more detested by a free reflecting people."‡

But we seriously question the soundness of this reasoning which condoned the caucus in 1800 and condemned it in 1824. In 1800 the country was divided into two great parties, each representing defined principles and policy, and each regarding the other with bitter hatred. In 1824 there was but one party, but this was divided into factions, personal and sectional, far more dangerous than the most bitter party division. When the division is between parties, the triumph of one means

* See Niles's Register, November 23, 1822 ; January 26, 1822 ; May 31, 1823.

† Niles's Register, August 16, 1823 ; objections of " Phocion."

‡ Niles's Register, January 26, 1822.

the pursuance of one policy in preference to another; between the two there being, probably, to an impartial observer, but little to choose, for it is seldom indeed that any considerable number of the people can be united in measures which would be ruinous to the nation. But when the conflict is one of factions, it partakes of the character of civil strife, which augurs no good for the peace of the country. Is not a device which secures union and harmony at such a time even more serviceable and laudable than one which answers the purpose of mere party organization? Measures, not men, say the opponents of the caucus; principles, not persons. But on a question of measures and principles the common sense and the integrity of the people can be more safely trusted than when personal jealousies and antipathies are at war.

This view is well expressed in a report presented in 1824 to the Virginia legislature: "With five candidates for the Presidency, each zealously supported by his immediate adherents, enlisting in his behalf sectional feelings and local attachments, we are threatened with internal schism. * * * Heretofore the struggle * * * has been carried on between the two great parties, * * * but no geographical line was drawn, no local feeling engendered by reason thereof. * * * (Now) we are threatened with the array of State against State, of the East against the West and the North against the South."*

With five candidates so evenly matched and contesting so keenly for the honor, it was certain that unless some means were found for concentrating the votes on one in preference to the others, no one could receive a majority in the electoral college, and the election would therefore be thrown into the House of Representatives. Some, indeed, were so sanguine as to hope that means would be found of preventing this, but the later course of events proved that their hopes were not founded on reason. The alter-

* Niles, January 23, 1824; see also Niles, May 31, 1823, quotation from the "Albany Argus."

native of a choice by the House was looked upon with dread. It had not been regarded by the framers of the Constitution as a necessity likely to arise, but the experience of 1801 had taught the people to look upon the possibility as a serious peril. Hence many strong opponents of the principles of the caucus urgently advocated its continuance till a better method might be devised.*

It was unfortunate that the country could not yet adopt such a national convention as was secured less than ten years later. It is interesting to note that one of the earliest proposals for such a convention, which appeared in 1822, outlined a system almost identical with that now in vogue. To prevent unjust selections, the writer says the people "must choose delegates in all the States, to meet in some central place * * * to select and recommend some suitable person for the Presidency. The delegates so chosen, must be specially instructed by their respective States, whom to support; and the delegates so chosen must, in no case, be incumbents (or expectants) of office." Thus far we see in this only the present national convention. The proposal continues, "that the result of the meeting of delegates be published for the consideration of the American people; that, notwithstanding any selection and recommendation by a convention of delegates, the electors, when chosen, must vote independently of any previous recommendation or selection. That, from this combined expression of the public sentiment, first by delegates chosen to select and recommend, and, second by electors chosen to elect, no doubt the best and most honest selection and election would result."†

Early in the following year a Pennsylvania delegate, in a letter to the "Franklin Gazette," says: "I sincerely hope that Pennsylvania will take the lead in recommending a national convention. It is the only plan calculated to conciliate and har-

* Niles, Dec. 7, 1822; National Intelligencer, July 23, 1823; Aug. 16, 1823.

† Niles. February 23, 1822.

monize the Republican party throughout the union."* The State convention system, which had from an early time been familiar in connection with the caucus, had by this time become more firmly established, and in Pennsylvania the legislative caucus had been replaced by the convention system.† The country was apparently not far from the adoption of the national convention. But the movement in favor of such a plan had not yet taken sufficiently definite shape, and the caucus remained the only known method of securing union among the candidates.

That the caucus proved unable to satisfy the great need which the country brought to it was due to a primary defect in its character, of which we have already spoken. Owing to the lack of definite organization and duly recognized authority it failed to command respect, and, being not a truly representative body, became an evil where it should have been a positive good. The almost successful attempt on the part of Crawford's friends in 1816 to obtain for him the nomination had disgusted and alarmed the nation. But had the legitimacy of the caucus been unquestioned and the force of its proceedings generally recognized, the friends of Monroe would have attended the meeting in larger numbers, thus saving it from the opprobrium of so nearly thwarting the will of the people. In like manner, had the caucus in 1824 occupied a position of recognized dignity and validity, such as the nominating convention to-day enjoys, it would have commanded the attendance of all the members of Congress. Assembled from every district in the union; informed by the action of the State legislatures, and by correspondence with their constituents of the wishes of the people whom they represented, but aware, withal, of the true purpose of a nominating body to ascertain the will of the majority and to secure the compliance of the minority thereto, they would have

* *Ibid.* January 17, 1824.

† Niles, June 21, 1823.

united on a candidate who, in consequence, would have probably received the support of a majority of the party.

But the caucus had never reached a position where it could effect so great a good, and now, being unable to unite the supporters of the various candidates in favor of any one, it could be of no avail. The five candidates centered their strength in different sections of the country. Clay was a favorite especially in the West; Adams was distinctively the New England hero; Jackson was the idol of his own State; Calhoun centered his backing chiefly in South Carolina, and Crawford was strongest in Georgia.* Each State or section was fearful of not carrying its favorite, and as early as 1822 candidates were formally placed in nomination for the still distant presidential election by State legislatures, nearly all of which took this course.”†

In this way was found a transitional device by which to replace the caucus. From a date prior to the rise of the Congressional caucus it had been customary for State legislatures to take action in supplying the offices of State administration.‡ It had been an easy and a natural step from participation in State affairs to action in matters of national interest, and at least as early as 1812 it had become the practice in many States to hold caucuses, either before or after the meeting of the Congressional caucus, to anticipate or confirm (or it might be, oppose), the decisions of that body.|| But besides being subject to most of the faults of the Congressional caucus, these legislative caucuses were peculiarly weak in being totally unable to concentrate the votes of the party beyond the State limits. The legislative method was, therefore, more productive of schism and discontent than of union, and could fill

* National Intelligencer, Aug. 20, 1823.

† Niles's Register, Nov. 1, 1823; Nov. 5, 1823; May 3, 1823; Oct. 25, 1823. National Intelligencer, Nov. 22, 1823; Jan. 2, 1823, *et al.*

‡ See J. S. Walton, “Nominating Conventions in Pennsylvania,” Amer. Hist. Rev.

|| See Niles, Mar. 21, 1812. National Intelligencer, Mar. 3, 1812; Mar. 28, 1812, *et al.*

only in a very unsatisfactory manner the place from which the caucus was driven.

It did not occur to the anti-caucus agitators, either in 1816 or 1824, that the best way to prevent the caucus from making a choice contrary to the wishes of the people would be to attend the meeting in full force, and thus make it truly representative. They followed, instead, the unwise course of allowing the caucus to earn such a bad reputation that it must succumb to the popular indignation. The supporters of Mr. Clay and of Mr. Adams, after some discussion as to whether they should "doom the caucus to a positive or negative death; * * * whether they should kill the monster or let it kill itself," decided to let it kill itself.* The monster's suicide was not long delayed, but it was accompanied by bitter feelings which made their influence felt even through the Jacksonian era.

Meanwhile the floor of Congress was the scene of a prolonged and heated debate in which the subject of the caucus monopolized the time and energies of even the dignified Senate. The subject of the caucus had been first introduced into Congress in 1814 in connection with the proposed change by amendment of the Constitution, in the electoral system.† It was proposed to choose the electors uniformly throughout the country by vote in Districts, and it was thought by many that this would remove the necessity of legislative caucuses. The plan was still in discussion in 1824, and called forth from Senator King the first open attack, on the floor of Congress, against the caucus.‡

The proceedings of the Crawford nomination had been made known, and Mr. King first called the attention of the Senate to a "new, extraordinary, self-created, central power, stronger than the power of the Constitution, which has risen up at the seat of government; a power which has assumed the direction and con-

* National Intelligencer, Feb. 3, 1824.

† American Register, II, 67, 68.

‡ Benton's Abridgment of Debates, V, 110, 111, 117, 678; VII, 517 ff.

trol of the fundamental provisions of the Constitution, relative to the election of the President." This was the inauguration of a debate which came to an end only with the close of the session, in which the various arguments were rehearsed in favor of and against the caucus.

When Congress came together it was evident, notwithstanding the fact that many of the State legislatures had passed resolutions favoring the holding of a caucus, that the meeting would be attended only by the friends of Mr. Crawford.* An attempt was made to hold a meeting on Saturday, December 27, 1823, but so few responded to the call that it was postponed.† Before a second attempt was made, twenty-four members of Congress took pains to ascertain the number of members who were in favor of a caucus nomination. Their inquiries elicited "satisfactory information" that of 261 members, 181 deemed it inexpedient, under the circumstances, to hold a caucus.‡ Notwithstanding this, a formal call, signed by eleven members, was issued for the 14th of February.||

The meeting assembled, but so poorly was it attended that the empty seats, in contrast with the crowded galleries, presented a ridiculous appearance, and Mr. Markley, of Pennsylvania, proposed that the meeting be adjourned until the 20th, in order to afford the opponents further time to reflect.¶ But the motion was lost, and the caucus, composed of twenty-five per cent. of the Congress, proceeded to a ballot, on which Mr. Crawford received sixty votes out of sixty-eight cast for President, and Albert Gallatin was chosen for the second place on the ticket. Concluding their report with the customary declaration of merely individual responsibility for their proceedings, the caucus further ordered an address to the people to be prepared by a

* Niles, Dec. 13, 1823.

† *Ibid.*, Dec. 27, 1823.

‡ National Intelligencer, Feb. 7, 1824.

|| *Ibid.*

¶ *Ibid.*, Feb. 17, 1824.

select committee. An address was accordingly drawn up, expressing the regret of the meeting that the course had not been sanctioned by their fellow-Congressmen, and declaring their belief in the necessity of such action in order to prevent divisions among the Republicans, the question being, in their judgment, "one touching the dismemberment or preservation of the party."*

This was the last Congressional nominating caucus. So intense was the disrepute attached to its final attempt to "dictate to the people" that never again could its revival be possible. There followed a short period in which the unsatisfactory system of scattered State nominations was able to secure General Jackson's election, and by the next campaign the national convention had appeared to solve in a satisfactory manner the long unsettled question of presidential nominations. There was at first, however, felt some fear lest the caucus might recover, as it had done in 1824, from an apparent annihilation, and efforts were made to prevent such a misfortune. An amendment to the Constitution was proposed, which provided for the abolition of the electors, substituting a direct popular vote. If no one received a majority at this first election, a second should be held, to choose between the two highest candidates. By this means it was thought to do away with all "intermediate agencies," electors, caucuses and all.† But there was no need of such a device. The caucus, as a machine for the nomination of presidential candidates, had passed out of existence.

In Washington's Farewell Address we read the following words of warning: "All combinations and associations whatsoever, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to direct, control, counteract or awe, the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities are destructive of this fundamental principle (of the Constitution), and of fatal tendency. They serve to organize factions;

* National Intelligencer, Feb. 17, 1824.

† Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 78 ff.

* * * to put in the place of the delegated will of the nation, the will of a party, often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community. * * * However combinations or associations of the above description may now and then answer the popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become political engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men, will be enabled to subvert the power of the people, and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion."* The Congressional caucus at first served a useful purpose, providing means for an end which could not otherwise be attained. But, ill calculated by nature to win the confidence of the people, it was not designed for a permanent institution of government. Hindered from performing its true functions by the jealous timidity with which it was regarded, it assumed an even more dangerous aspect than was innate in it, and was led by the anticipatory apprehension of the people, to the worst that had been prophesied. It was therefore inevitable that it would be superseded by the first less objectionable expedient that might be devised, and it was right that it should. For although the bridge which has carried us over, is indeed a good bridge,† so long as it remains stable and secure, he would be a foolish man who would entrust himself to a tottering plank passage when the iron structure of modern workmanship is at hand. But nevertheless, the plank bridge which once carried us safely over the water in time of danger, deserves not to be looked back upon with contempt as soon as we have safely reached the shore; neither ought we to condemn the caucus without a thought of the work it once accomplished.

*Washington, Works, XII., 223.

†Benton, Abridgment of Debates, VII., 532.

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